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TECHNICAL REPORT NO. 26



**Cooperative Motion of Side Groups in Amorphous Polymers: Dipolar
Interactions**

by

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**Submitted for publication
in**

Polymer Preprints

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Kingston, On., Canada**

November 6, 1995

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)			2. REPORT DATE November 6, 1995	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Cooperative Motion of Side Groups in Amorphous Polymers: Dipolar Interactions			5. FUNDING NUMBERS N00014-93-1-0615	
6. AUTHOR(S) X. Meng, A. Natansohn, C. Barrett and R. Pochon			7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Department of Chemistry Queen's University Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6 Canada	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Department of the Navy Office of the Naval Research 800 North Quincy Street Arlington, VA 22217-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER 26	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Submitted to Polymer Preprints			10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
12a. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Reproduction in whole or in part is permitted for any purpose of the United States Government. This document has been approved for public release and sale; its distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
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14. SUBJECT TERMS polar interaction, cooperative motion, azo and ester groups, photoinduced birefringence			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 2	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Unlimited	

COOPERATIVE MOTION OF SIDE GROUPS IN AMORPHOUS POLYMERS: DIPOLAR INTERACTIONS

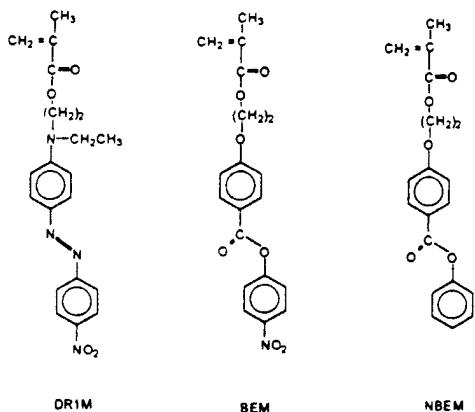
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INTRODUCTION

We have recently reported a cooperative motion in amorphous polymers containing polar azobenzene and ester rigid groups¹. When the azobenzene groups are photochemically oriented through isomerization induced by polarized light, the ester groups move in concert to produce a significant increase in the photoinduced birefringence (up to four times). The experiments were performed on films of copolymers of 4'-[(2-(methacryloyloxy)ethyl) ethylamino]-4-nitroazobenzene (DRIM) 4-nitrophenyl 4-[[2-[(2-methyl-1-oxo-2-propenyl)oxy]ethyl]oxy] benzoate (BEM) shown in Scheme 1.

Scheme 1



Such cooperative motion is well known in side-chain liquid crystalline polymers and is driven in that case by the thermodynamic tendency to align. Such a tendency does not exist in poly(DRIM-co-BEM), and the explanation for the cooperative motion may be either a dipolar interaction (both groups have dipole moments of about 7D) or a steric factor (minimizing the free volume necessary for motion) or a combination of both. To answer this question, copolymers of DRIM with a less polar analogue of BEM have been synthesized and their photochemical behavior investigated. The monomer (shown above) is 4-phenyl-4-[[2-[(2-methyl-1-oxo-2-propenyl)oxy]ethyl]oxy]benzoate (NBEM), with a dipole moment of only 0.95 D (calculated from molecular models).

EXPERIMENTAL

DRIM, BEM and NBEM were synthesized as previously described¹ and by a slightly modified method. The polymerization of DRIM, BEM and NBEM and their copolymerizations were carried out in dioxane or toluene at 60 °C initiated with AlBN. The polymers obtained were purified by reprecipitation twice from methanol.

The procedure for reversibly introducing birefringence on a polymer film using a polarized/circularly polarized laser beam has been previously described². Electronic spectra were recorded on a Shimadzu Spectrometer.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Monomers and Copolymers. The reactivity ratios obtained for the DRIM/BEM pair and for the DRIM/NBEM pair are $r_{DRIM} = 1.03$, $r_{BEM} = 0.82$ and $r_{DRIM} = 0.83$, $r_{NBEM} = 1.13$ respectively. As is expected for methacrylates having similar structures, these ratios are similar and near unity, showing no strong preference for either monomer. All copolymers are amorphous as determined by DSC and polarized microscopy. Since BEM and NBEM are quite similar in structure (bonding, shape and size) but have different dipole moments, a comparison of these two systems should be expected to elucidate the polarity effect on the photoinduced orientation.

Absorption Spectra. Similar to that found in poly(DRIM-co-BEM) series¹ the electronic spectra of poly(DRIM-co-NBEM) films also show a shift of the visible absorption maximum. The magnitude of the shift is a function of the azo structural units content in the copolymer, as shown in Figure 1. At the same DRIM content, the λ_{max} for BEM copolymer films are larger than for NBEM copolymer films. This is because BEM associates with DRIM as a polar "solvent" inducing a red shift of the azo chromophore absorbance, similar to results in solution reported by Whitten and coworkers³. The red shift for very low azo contents is comparable to that obtained for copolymers of DRIM with methyl methacrylate (MMA)⁴. Thus, for an intramolecular interaction point of view, the effects of "nonpolar" NBEM and MMA of DRIM are similar. This obviously also confirms that the interaction between BEM and DRIM is stronger than that between NBEM and DRIM groups.

Photoinduced birefringence. The saturated levels of induced birefringence in poly(DRIM-co-BEM) and poly(DRIM-co-NBEM) films are plotted as a function of the DRIM structural unit weight fraction in Figure 2. A linear increase in the photoinduced birefringence with the azo content is found for the NBEM copolymers. Since the birefringence is supposed to arise from the orientation of the azo groups, one would expect a linear dependence of the birefringence on the weight fraction of the azo groups. This is

what happens in blends of a homopolymer containing azo groups in each structural unit with an "inert" homopolymer (poly(MMA))⁴. The linear dependence on azo weight fraction clearly indicates that if there is any cooperative motion between the DRIM and NBEM groups, it certainly contributes a negligible amount to the overall birefringence of the copolymer.

The behavior of poly(DRIM-co-BEM) is quite different, as previously reported¹. The birefringence of poly(DRIM-co-BEM) increases fast with the azo concentration up to about 40 %, then it becomes almost constant at about the same value as poly(DRIM). The increase of birefringence in comparison with poly(DRIM-co-NBEM) is directly related to the presence of the BEM groups¹.

The obvious difference between the two copolymer series presented here is the polarity of the ester group. When the ester group is almost nonpolar, all the birefringence in the copolymer films comes from the orientation of the azo groups. When the ester group has a polarity similar to the azo group, the two types of groups move together driven by the photoselection process which only the azo groups undergo. If the steric factor would be important in this concerted motion, some increase in birefringence above the additivity values in poly(DRIM-co-NBEM) would also be expected. This does not happen, hence it is very likely that dipolar interactions of the charge transfer type are the only driving force for the cooperative motion.

CONCLUSIONS

Two ester-type monomers with different polarity, BEM and NBEM, copolymerize with the azo-containing monomer DRIM in random fashion and form amorphous copolymers. The polarity of BEM is comparable to the polarity of DRIM, and the electronic spectra confirm that BEM and DRIM interact with each other more strongly than NBEM and DRIM do. A nonlinear increase of the photoinduced birefringence as a function of azo content is found in DRIM copolymers with the polar BEM group, while the increase is linear in copolymers with the nonpolar NBEM group. Comparison between the two copolymer series suggests that the dipolar association between BEM and DRIM is the major factor causing cooperative motion in these amorphous copolymers, enhancing the photoinduced birefringence.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the Office of Naval Research USA, NSERC Canada and the Department of National Defense Canada for funding. A. N. thanks Canada Council for a Killam Research Fellowship.

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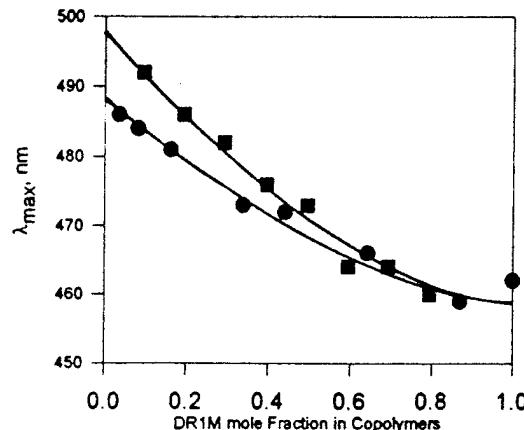


Fig. 1. Visible absorption maxima in electronic spectra of ■ poly(DRIM-co-BEM) and ● poly(DRIM-co-NBEM).

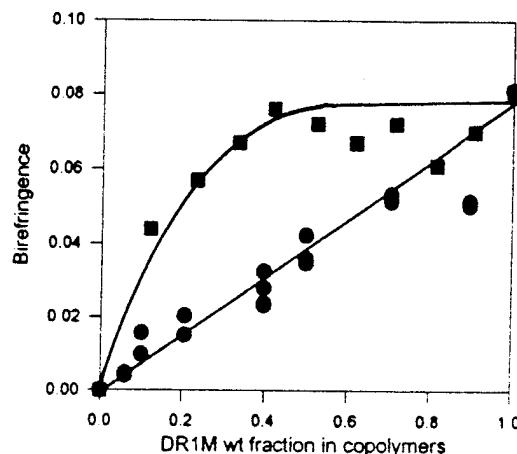


Fig. 2. Photoinduced birefringence of ■ poly(DRIM-co-BEM) and ● poly(DRIM-co-NBEM) vs. DRIM weight fraction